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GIY Local Climate Action Plan – Consultation Submission

Comhairliúchán:

Climate Action Plan Pre-Draft Consultation

A Place-based food growing strategy for Waterford City

Caibidil: Waterford City - The journey become the country's...

The food system is one of the largest contributors to GhG emissions, accounting for 30% of global emissions. In addition, the symptoms of a broken food system in terms of planetary health include biodiversity collapse, soil degradation, depletion of water resources, food waste, and the plastic and chemical pollution used in the production and distribution of food. The symptoms in terms of human health are hunger (affecting 10% of people globally), overweight and obesity (affecting 2 billion people), diet related illness and poor mental health.

We have, by contrast, the opportunity to re-frame food growing as a climate action that puts people at the forefront of solving the climate change and food system crises, whereas it has traditionally been presented as a lifestyle hobby, largely aimed at a more mature and settled demographic. In addition to the beneficial outcomes of food growing (health benefits, carbon saving, access to nutritious food, saving money), even more important is the behaviour/mindset change (eating more plants, wasting less food etc) that results from growing food.

Food Growing as an environmental action for Waterford

1. There are direct carbon benefits associated with food growing when it's done locally and organically. We know from 3rd party academic research that there is an equivalent per kilo saving of CO2 emissions per kilo of vegetables grown locally utilising organic practices. We know from our own research that 50 kg's of vegetables can be produced from the average garden-size growing space each year across the growing season. If we consider the potential to utilise small growing spaces (urban, sub-urban and rural), the potential for direct climate action in Waterford City is significant.
2. Furthermore, when people grow their own food they establish a deeper reconnection with where their food comes from. This increased awareness and knowledge around food is what we call **'food empathy'**. Increased food empathy leads to five significant behaviour and attitude changes: eating more plants, wasting less food, following the seasons, supporting local food producers and connecting with nature (soil and seasons).

Proposed Solution - Growing Waterford

GIY propose a dedicated *Growing Waterford* strategy which targets every sector of society with a food growing programme. This includes:

- Schools – embedding food growing and food system understanding into the primary school setting, ensuring the children are educated about our food system, and understand where their food comes from;
- Households – every family and household in Waterford with the skills, knowledge and tools to grow some of their own food.
- Workplaces – dedicated workplace programmes where Waterford businesses support their employees through food growing challenges (eg 8 week) and access to growing supports & resources;
- Communities – ring-fenced spaces for food growing in communities across Waterford. This includes communal/public spaces such as parks or community gardens, as well as areas within housing estates, sports grounds, hospital grounds, etc.

Main opinion:

Waterford, as an area recognized for its strengths' in food production through agriculture, fishing and other industries have the opportunity to bring food production into every home and community by engaging it's citizens in food growing as a skill and a sustainable activity that everyone can get involved in.

Main requests:

GIY recommend a targeted strategy for 'Growing Waterford' that facilitates food growing programmes across households, schools, communities & workplaces. This could include the provision of products – such as seeds/growing kits – as well as food growing and food system education programmes tailored to each societal cohort. Programme evaluation would involve pre- and post-evaluation where participants are invited to report on changes to knowledge, behaviours and attitudes that result from participation in food growing activity in short, medium and longer term timeframes.

Main reasons:

Implementing a Growing Waterford programme would;

- Facilitate analysis existing food growing activity but critically, an evaluation of existing levels of knowledge and behaviour relating to food origins, food growing and the food system.
- Provide people across all sectors of the society with the capacity to learn, and crucially with the agency to play a role in Waterford's journey to carbon neutrality as active, engaged citizens.
- Be a pioneer – within the broader context of initiatives such a net zero cities, etc – in evaluation of food growing & food system education as a targeted place-based climate action.
- Support climate resilience through the provision of local food supply and food growing capacity, as well as demonstrating how a place-based approach such as this can reduce reliance on imported foods (reducing food miles), mitigating against risks such disproportionate reliance on imported goods (as seen resulting from the crisis in Ukraine, for example).
- Climate adaptation by supporting soil health and biodiversity.
- Supporting personal health & wellbeing of Waterford's citizens, as local, organic food supply provides a healthy, nutritious source of food. This also addresses food poverty, supporting capacity for all communities to have a source of nutrition.

Documents Attached: Níl